

Hello, and thank you for hearing our concerns for our community. My name is Karen, and I work for Community Access Services here in Portland. I was asked by my employees to represent them today.

We work in a group home which provides 24-hour support for five individuals who require a high level of care. Every employee understands the care they provide is partly a labor of love. They tell me that their work is devalued because everyone knows "You don't get into a helping field to make money, you do it to help."

How is this perception okay? Accepting personal poverty should NOT be a requirement to help people.

Direct support professional care providers are expected to be highly skilled, thoroughly vetted, and continually trained. Few fields require so much from its workers. These rigorous standards also come with an expectation of flawless execution. Yet, somehow, I see those same workers in line at food-banks, or having to crowd-fund for basic needs.

Please, do not misunderstand. The standards are not too high. The individuals we serve deserve the best care.

Individuals with disabilities historically suffer the most severe marginalization, exploitation, and abuse of any people. Even today, we STILL struggle to abolish policies which dehumanize them. Because of this I argue, our expectations to assist our individuals should never be set lower.

Instead, our compensation for this level of excellence in service MUST start to match these expectations.

Because workers hold our individuals in such high esteem, the workers are willing to sacrifice. Work long hours, work under conditions not seen in other fields, and work in chronically short-staffed positions – something endemic to this field. In short, my employees are willing to do anything and everything so the quality of life for our individuals does not diminish. While it feels nice to hear how much our efforts are appreciated, good feelings are not enough to provide for my workers.

If you hold us in any esteem, please ensure we can continue to afford to live. We shouldn't have to beg, but I will if I have to. I will beg. I will work harder, longer, and do whatever it is you ask. Just please, please allow my staff to be paid their worth. Thank you.

Karen DeCosta, QDDP, BSHS, MIOP  
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